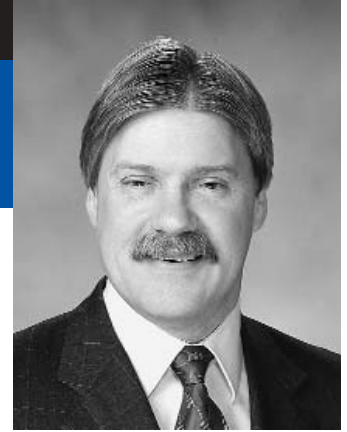


2004 Legislative Report



**Senator
Tim Sheldon**

35th Legislative District

Dear Neighbor:

Throughout this year's 60 day legislative session, I continued working for a more efficient state.

At the beginning of the session, I sent you an opinion survey. I received 4,000 responses. The mail room commented that this is more than any other senator has ever received. I have included the results of the survey in this newsletter.

As you may know, I am a legislator who votes with the people, not the party. Your comments and ideas are valuable to me. I made many decisions this session based on your responses from the survey as well as your phone calls, e-mails and letters. It is an honor to represent you in the Senate and I appreciate your interest and your thoughts.

Please feel free to continue to contact my office in Olympia at (360) 786-7668 or via e-mail at sheldon_ti@leg.wa.gov. I look forward to hearing from you and seeing you in the district during the interim.

Sincerely,

Tim Sheldon
State Senator, 35th Legislative District

Olympia Office:

422 John A. Cherberg Bldg.
P.O. Box 40435
Olympia, WA 98504-0435
Phone: (360) 786-7668
FAX: (360) 786-7524

District Office:

P.O. Box 474
Hoodsport, WA 98548
Phone: (360) 877-5768

E-mail:

Sheldon_ti@leg.wa.gov

Toll-free Legislative

Hot Line:
(800) 562-6000

Hearing-impaired

Hot Line:
(800) 635-9993

35th District Survey Results — January 2004

A bill that will be before the Legislature this session proposes an amendment to the state constitution that would allow local school levies, and perhaps bonds, to pass with a simple majority vote (50 percent plus one), instead of the 60 percent super majority currently needed. Would you support this measure?

Yes: 41 percent

No: 59 percent

Another idea to generate more funding for public schools is the idea of a 1-cent sales tax increase. Would you support a 1-cent increase in the state sales tax to provide more funding for public schools?

Yes: 34 percent

No: 66 percent

Last session, the Legislature passed a 5-cent increase in the state gas tax, a 15 percent gross-weight fee increase for commercial trucks and a 0.3 percent sales

tax increase on motor vehicles. These tax increases will pay for \$4.2 billion in road improvements during the next 10 years. Do you support these tax increases?

Yes: 53 percent

No: 47 percent

Would you support partially funding new highways and bridges with tolls?

Yes: 58 percent

No: 42 percent

Property taxes are a big concern. As property values have increased, many people are being forced to sell their homes because they can no longer afford to pay the property taxes. Would you support a measure that would cap property taxes?

Yes: 87 percent

No: 13 percent

(continued)

Survey results (continued)

A senior citizen property tax exemption is now available for seniors making less than \$30,000 a year. If you would like more information, please contact your county assessor's office. Have you applied for the senior citizen property tax exemption?

Yes: 14 percent

No: 86 percent

For most people, the cost of quality health care goes up every year. Many experts say the rising cost of medical malpractice insurance is partly to blame. Some doctors are actually leaving the profession because they can no longer pay for medical malpractice insurance. Would you support a measure that capped the amount people could receive in damages from malpractice lawsuits to make malpractice insurance more affordable?

Yes: 85 percent

No: 15 percent

A federal court has ruled our state's blanket primary system unconstitutional. The blanket primary allows voters to choose any candidate on the ballot regardless of party affiliation. If we have to replace the blanket primary, which system would you prefer?

Closed primary, where voters must register with a political party when they register to vote. At the polls, they receive a ballot with only their chosen party's candidates for office: **9 percent**

Open primary, where voters do not have to register with a party, but have to choose a party-specific ballot at the polls: **17 percent**

Modified blanket primary, where voters simply select one candidate in each race. The two candidates who receive the most votes proceed to the general election, regardless of party affiliation: **75 percent**

Here's my voting record on

Supplemental Budget

(HB 2459) **I voted Yes** 

Though our state economy seems to be picking up, we remained conservative in our budgeting this year. I supported the supplemental budget, which includes several key funding items for residents of the 35th District.

The budget includes a special appropriation I requested for the Victims Assistance Program in Mason County. There is not a single domestic violence shelter in all of Mason County. As a result, many women and children have to travel a long distance to reach safe haven. The funding in this year's budget will help establish the first domestic violence shelter in Mason County.

The supplemental budget also funds a 1 percent salary increase for classified school employees. The average annual increase for school employees will be \$300 per year. There is also an increase in health care benefits for school employees.

Construction Budget

(HB 2573) **I voted Yes** 

All the community colleges in the 35th District received additional funding in the state construction budget. The budget also includes \$150,000 to enhance water quality in Hood Canal. The state will contract with the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group to work on preservation activities. I will be looking into possible solutions to the dissolved oxygen problem.

Medical Malpractice Reform

(SB 5728) **I voted Yes** 

Medical malpractice lawsuit awards are through the roof, driving up the cost of liability insurance for our state's doctors. Many of our best physicians are leaving the state or closing their practices because they can no longer afford their insurance costs. The people who are hurt the most are patients. High quality care is what's really at stake here.

I supported a bill that would have made several reforms to medical malpractice and patient issues, including putting a cap of \$350,000 on non-economic damages. This would bring the cost of insurance down dramatically. We passed the bill out of the Senate, but it died in the House.

the major issues of the 2004 session:



Transportation Budget (HB 2474)..... I voted Yes ☒

I voted for the supplemental transportation budget because it provides crucial funding for our district.

I requested \$1 million to upgrade State Route 101 at the Purdy Creek bridge, and the budget includes this funding. Initial funding is provided to begin construction, and an additional \$5.8 million will be budgeted over the next two years to complete the project.

The Purdy Creek bridge was built in 1932. Any heavy rain will almost guarantee that the highway will flood and strand residents in the area until the rain subsides. The project involves elevating Highway 101 over seasonal flood waters to keep the highway open and flood proof.

Primary Election (SB 6453)..... I voted Yes, ☒ but Gov. Gary Locke’s partial veto turns the bill on its head

The federal courts ruled that Washington’s blanket primary system was unconstitutional because the political parties’ First Amendment right to free association was violated. The parties want you to register with a particular party and only vote for one party’s candidates in the primary election.

Our primary system has been in place for more than 70 years and voters have been pleased with the process. That’s why I supported a new system that is as close as possible to the old blanket primary. I co-sponsored a bill that would create a modified blanket primary system with no party registration. Under this plan, the two candidates who receive the most votes in the primary would advance to the general election, regardless of party.

We passed this “top two” system out of the Senate with a 28-20 vote. The final bill included an alternate system that would require you to choose one party’s ballot when you vote. Gov. Locke vetoed the top two system and signed into law the back-up system, which would require voters to choose a particular party’s ballot. This system would actually prevent you from voting for any candidate you choose. In my opinion, Gov. Locke has pleased the political bosses and ignored you, the voter.

Home Health Care Workers (HB 1777)..... I voted Yes ☒

Home health workers take care of the most vulnerable citizens in our state, including disabled people and senior citizens who, in many cases, are not able to leave their homes.

This session, we passed a bill that will give pay raises to 26,000 home care workers in our state. This is in response to Initiative 775, passed by the state’s voters in 2002. Home care workers will receive a 50-cent hourly pay increase, workers’ compensation coverage, and, if they work half time or more, they will receive health care benefits.

Our district is home to a number of home health workers, and I’m glad to see they will be compensated for the important work they do.

School Levy Equalization (SB 6211) I Voted No ☒

This bill would have changed the way school district levies are calculated. As I researched the bill, I found that it would mostly benefit wealthier school districts that are almost always successful at passing levies. I looked at the numbers and realized this bill would hurt schools in my district, so I voted against it.

Rural Development Tax Incentives (SB 5319, SB 6240) I voted Yes ☒

I prime sponsored two bills that will extend tax incentives for manufacturing companies that locate in rural counties. These companies are important to the state economy, especially in rural areas. So we should encourage them to locate here.

2004 Legislative Report

Small Business Group Insurance (HB 2460) I Voted Yes

The cost of health insurance for small business owners is growing out of control. We need to take action before insurance costs exceed business owners' profits.

I supported a bill this session that will allow insurance companies to offer an "economy plan" to small businesses. The plan allows insurance companies to offer a less comprehensive package of benefits to small businesses and their employees. The bill will reduce the cost of insurance for small businesses and encourage more insurance companies to compete for their business.

Senior Property Tax Relief (SB 5034) I Voted Yes

Many retired homeowners are on fixed incomes. While their property taxes go up, their income remains the same.

Retired people older than 60 and people who retired because of a disability will see some property tax relief in the coming year. The property tax deferral program has increased the eligibility limit to \$40,000 per year, up from \$30,000 per year. Annual income is assessed under \$35,000 to allow for more partial deductions.

Please contact my office if you would like more information about your eligibility.

Sex Offender Sentencing (HB 2400) I Voted Yes

We passed a bill this session that strengthens sentencing guidelines for sex offenders. I will continue to advocate for stronger penalties for offenders who prey on children.

35th Legislative District
Tim Sheldon
Senator

PO Box 40435 • Olympia WA 98504-0435

2004 Legislative Report

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage Paid
Olympia, WA
Permit #133